

Supply—External Affairs

this connection. It is pointed out to me, Mr. Chairman, that tomorrow will be the 100th day of this session, and I think we all hope the session is on the wane. I suggest it just is not good enough, in the type of world in which we live, not to have a committee on external affairs meeting until the 100th day of the session—if we are going to meet tomorrow morning, and I am not too certain of that.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I agree with my hon. friend.

Mr. Brewin: The minister says he agrees with me. He is in a position to do something about it, if he agrees with me. It seems to me that the regular meeting of the committee on external affairs is essential if members of parliament are to participate in the formulation of Canada's international policy and if they are to be able to interpret adequately to the Canadian people policies on international affairs. It has been suggested to me, and no doubt to other members of this committee, that when Canadian parliamentary representatives go abroad they sometimes have to take a back seat when international issues are being seriously discussed. If this is so—and I believe it is so, from what I have heard—I am quite sure it is not because of any natural deficiency of understanding on the part of Canadians or Canadian parliamentarians. I believe it is because the government has made too little effort to acquaint members of parliament with the problems of international affairs. I suggest that the failure to call the committee on external affairs into being is a symptom of this attitude.

Mr. Chairman, my colleagues will no doubt wish to contribute to this debate, enlarge on some of the points I have made and raise others. I would like to conclude by telling the committee that we in this party seek, as I am sure all other members do, to contribute all that we can in hard thinking, intelligent planning and effective criticism to the strategy of peace, upon which the survival of all Canadians, and indeed of all humanity, depends.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Chairman, on rising to speak in this debate tonight I would first like to congratulate the minister upon the speech he made this afternoon, particularly on his flow of words and beautiful language in dealing with the subject that no doubt is nearest to his heart. We in Canada—and I could not help thinking about this, this afternoon as I listened to the minister's speech—must be more concerned, as Canadians, with specifics as they relate to our role in world affairs.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs gave us the chance to turn for a while from the domestic issues that so often engross us

and look at ourselves, not simply as a country living unto itself but as a member of a world family of nations with certain duties and responsibilities, not simply to our own citizens but to others in many other parts of the world with whom we must maintain relationships. It has been my personal privilege and experience to spend some 17 years living and working amongst peoples of other lands, not at the level of the foreign diplomat but down at the level where people actually live. As a result of this experience I have become keenly aware of and am most interested in the affairs that take place in the world, their relationship to us and our responsibilities in regard to them. I regret that there is apparently so little interest in world affairs on the part of so many of our members, as is evidenced by the number of empty seats in the chamber. I do not think any one of us can deny the fact that we live in a world in which no man can consider himself alone; no man is an island unto himself, as it has been said. Yet so many of us as members of parliament do not seem to be interested enough in what is going on in the world as it relates to us to even concern ourselves with debates and discussions on this topic. I would remind the government of the fact that members of the government owe a greater responsibility to their Secretary of State for External Affairs than is indicated by the small number of members now sitting in the benches on the other side of the chamber.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Chairman, I would join the previous speaker in saying that I think one of our greatest shortcomings—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Chairman, may I point out to my hon. friend, since he has referred to the fact that many members are absent from the chamber, that there is a cabinet meeting being held tonight in connection with matters having to do with the proceedings of the federal-provincial conference. This is an important meeting.

Mr. Thompson: I thank the minister very much and I acknowledge the truth of what he has said. But the attendance in the chamber was not any better this afternoon, and certainly there ought to be more members present who are not participants in cabinet meetings tonight. I join the previous speaker in saying that I think one of the greatest shortcomings in the activities of this house is the fact that the committee on external affairs has not yet been set up. One of the things I looked forward to in coming to parliament was the opportunity and privilege of taking part in the proceedings and discussions of